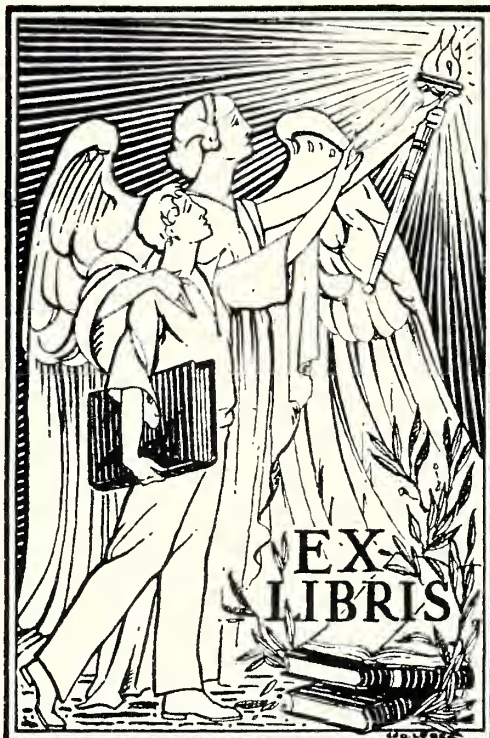


ACTIVITIES OF THE NEW
JERSEY STATE COMMISSION FOR
THE BLIND - By George F. Meyer

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THE ACTIVITIES OF THE NEW JERSEY STATE COMMISSION
FOR THE BLIND

By

GEORGE F. MEYER

In discussing the activities of the New Jersey State Commission for the Blind I am conscious of the fact that most people in this audience are familiar with the obligations which usually are associated with a well organized state agency, and realize that the services rendered by such an agency are likely to fall into a general pattern.

Of course any state program must adjust itself to appropriations and other facilities at its disposal, to the population to be served, to the area to be covered, to the distribution of governmental functions as between the various departments of the state, and, finally, to the extent of assistance which can be expected from cooperating agencies under private auspices.

The State of New Jersey is relatively small, and it is not difficult to go to any part of the State by car and return within the same day.

The population is, roughly, 4,000,000. We have some of the most congested areas in the country - perhaps in the world - and we have rural areas that are as distinctive as any in the country.

New Jersey has no private agencies that maintain a program of independent service to the blind which can relieve the Commission of any of those major responsibilities usually associated with a complete program. For this reason, the Com-



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mission is required to cover the entire gamut of services to the blind, meeting the needs of every age from the cradle to the grave, as well as specific areas of service such as employment, education, etc., which society has provided for the seeing.

Of the staff of thirty-three, thirteen carry the immediate responsibilities of direct service to blind people. Of these thirteen senior staff members, nine are blind. I doubt if there is any other state agency in the country with so large a proportion of its senior staff without sight.

The work of the Commission seems to divide itself naturally into certain definite areas, prevention, education, home teaching, home industries, employment, financial assistance, and general and miscellaneous services.

In the field of prevention, a staff member experienced in the field of medical service devotes her full time to the follow-up of cases where there seems a requirement for service looking to the prevention of blindness, or the restoration of vision. The limitation of personnel has made it impossible to extend this beyond the case work procedure, and up to this time we have been able to do little in the field of prevention beyond this.

The Commission is developing an excellent contact with the medical field, first, through the organization of a committee on conservation of vision within the set-up of the Medical Society of New Jersey, and, secondly, through an ophthalmological advisory committee which works directly with the Commission in giving advice on all matters of ophthalmological concern.



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New Jersey is, perhaps, the only populous State in the Union which does not have an institution for the instruction of the blind. However, we consider it an advantage rather than a disadvantage because our plan of assigning children to institutions most appropriate for their special needs makes it possible for us to choose the school which in our judgment best meets the needs of each pupil. About one-third of the blind children of New Jersey are thus provided for at the Pennsylvania Institution for the Instruction of the Blind, Overbrook, Pennsylvania, and at the New York Institute for the Education of the Blind, New York City, with scattered assignments to other residential schools within easy access.

Two-thirds of the blind children of New Jersey are cared for in public school systems of those communities where the demand lies. These classes look to the Commission for advice and guidance and these, together with the institutional assignments just referred to, and a system of tutor-reader service made available to individual high school students, provides the educational pattern for blind children of the State.

As a part of its educational service the Commission supervises the pre-school environment of blind children, and makes such adjustment as may be required, even to the extent of providing permanent or custodial care for children under compulsory school age.

New Jersey provides special assistance in the form of a \$200 scholarship for tuition , and \$300 scholarship for reading, and other expense for blind students wishing to take advantage of

The first part of the paper discusses the importance of the study of the history of the United States. It is argued that a knowledge of the past is essential for a full understanding of the present. The author then proceeds to a detailed examination of the early years of the Republic, from the time of the signing of the Declaration of Independence to the end of the War of 1812. This section covers the political, social, and economic developments of the period, and the role of the various states in the formation of the new nation. The author also discusses the influence of the Enlightenment on the American mind, and the role of the Founding Fathers in shaping the new government. The second part of the paper deals with the period from 1812 to 1860, and the events leading up to the Civil War. It examines the growing tensions between the North and the South, and the role of slavery in the conflict. The author also discusses the impact of the war on the nation, and the changes that resulted from the Reconstruction period. The final part of the paper is a conclusion, in which the author summarizes the main points of the study and offers some thoughts on the future of the United States.

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higher education. In order to place this assistance where it would accomplish the most, the Commission some three years ago, in cooperation with the College Entrance Examination Board, adapted to the use of the blind the College Aptitudes Test used by that Board for college entrance. Each applicant is required to pass this test with a score of at least 500 - the average score for sighted applicants - in order to participate in the Commission's scholarship. An educational advisory committee working with the Commission helps to solve the further problems of these applicants.

As a part of its educational services, the Commission has for four years maintained a Camp for blind children. The program of this Camp is not only designed to meet the recreational needs of these children, but in every detail is intended to tie in to the year round experience of the child and supplement those phases of the child's experience and training which can not be met either at the residential school, or in the school and home training of the public school child.

The home teaching program of the New Jersey Commission has long been one of the most outstanding in the country. Miss Lydia Y. Hayes, who established the Commission for the Blind, was herself a devoted and experienced home teacher, and she incorporated into the very foundations of the service her rich experience with and deep insight into the needs of blind people to be met by the home teacher.

The State is divided into six areas, each under the direction of the home teacher, one of whom with lesser field responsibility

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acts as the head home teacher. All home teachers are without sight, and are supplied with full time guides, and auto maintenance.

This group is too well acquainted with the responsibilities of the home teacher to make it necessary for me to dwell long on the nature of the services performed by her. To the newly blinded she brings rehabilitation, courage, and a new outlook on a life that must be faced under new conditions. She gives instruction in typing, the various systems of reading, pencil-writing, handicrafts, the use of the Talking Book, the duties of the household, gives suggestions for means of getting about, and by all other practical means seeks to stimulate and adjust her pupil in meeting life anew.

In addition to her instructional duties it is the responsibility of the home teacher to be continuously conversant with the general status of those blind individuals residing in her area. It is anticipated that she will visit every client periodically for purposes of registration and determination for possibilities for service.

While the Commission relies upon particular staff members to render specialized services in specific fields such as education, prevention, etc., nevertheless, the home teacher is always considered to be available for emergency contacts required within her area, and it is expected that in order to render the widest type of service she will maintain ready contacts with social service agencies operating in her territory.

Out of the instruction in handicrafts the New Jersey Commission for the Blind has developed what may be looked upon as



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occupational therapy service in which blind people purchase material from the Commission and make it into articles that are sold through the Commission's home industries or sales department. Co-operating closely with the home teaching service the sales department concentrates upon making raw material available to clients of the Commission at the most reasonable price possible and, upon the inspection and ultimate sale of finished goods, sold through the commission in their behalf. The Commission pays transportation charges to and from its headquarters on all raw materials and finished goods sold to or for blind people, and no deductions are made for the sales service provided by the Commission.

Articles sold through the Commission are held to a high grade commercial standard. They are disposed of, for the most part, through organized sales held in connection with Weeks for the Blind, annually, in the larger communities in the State, and through smaller sales held at resorts and large gatherings. Recently an effort has been made to develop commercialized home industry for the full time employment of blind people in their homes through wholesale channels. This is still largely in the experimental stage and certain technical problems peculiar to governmental agencies must still be solved.

Experience has classified home workers into three general groups, - the "A" group, highly skilled, anxious and able to work full time, and available for commercial production; the "B" group, which is able to produce a satisfactory and saleable article, but which is able or willing to work only intermittently, and cannot

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be relied upon for regular production; the "C" group, whose quantity and quality of production is unlikely to approach commercial standards, but who require the occupational therapy made available through this program.

The licensing of stand operators in Federal Buildings is one of the responsibilities of the New Jersey Commission for the Blind. Indeed, the State has a little Randolph-Sheppard Bill of its own which opens to blind operators, under the supervision of the Commission for the Blind, stand locations in State, County, and local public buildings. Under the present program the Commission supplies equipment, stock, and petty cash, and while the operator receives all the profit from his stand he is, nevertheless, directly responsible to the Commission which maintains close supervision of the business. Title to the location is retained with the Commission which bears the expense of all supervision.

While the Commission has no organized placement service it has been able to utilize its W P A project in developing a foundation upon which a carefully organized placement service will be built as soon as appropriations are available.

The program of Blind Assistance is under the direct supervision of the Commission with field workers from the country welfare boards making necessary investigations. Such Assistance is given on a need basis and may not exceed \$480 in any one year.

There are other services of a more general character which are administered directly through the headquarters of the New Jersey Commission for the Blind.

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Through the courtesy of the Lions Clubs of the State any blind person who wishes one may secure a white cane by applying to the Commission.

Through an arrangement with theatrical managements a large number of theatres throughout the State admit a blind person and guide without charge upon presentation of a pass supplied through the Commission.

Through special arrangements made with certain local transportation companies the Commission supplies identification certificates and tickets which enable blind people in these particular areas to travel on busses with a guide for a single fare.

Through special legislation blind people, properly identified by the Commission, may secure fishing licenses without charge.

The Commission maintains a distributing service of Talking Book machines, and has attempted to provide proper upkeep for these machines.

The Commission serves as intermediary for the distribution of radios, Readers Digests, and other special gifts made available to blind people through the generosity of the public.

A limited loan service is maintained through private funds that have been made available through the Commission.

Unlike most other states, New Jersey has but one agency that devotes itself to the needs of blind people. This makes it possible to coordinate all activities in their behalf while, at the same time, it has the effect of making available only one channel of services for meeting these needs. Thus, New Jersey with

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an appropriation of little more than \$100,000 to meet all services of the blind, exclusive of cash payments for Assistance, is placed at a disadvantage with other states in which separate appropriations are made for various types of services, such as, education, rehabilitation, work-shops, field services, etc., and where private agencies supplement the work carried on through the public program with funds donated by a generous and interested public.

Our story of New Jersey would not be quite complete without making mention of the W P A project which has been maintained under the Commission for the Blind ever since the inauguration of the "made work" program of the Federal Government.

This project employing more than thirty persons - fifteen of whom are blind - has largely supplemented the home teaching service of the Commission although there is scarcely an area of service that has not received some impetus because of the additional assistance available.

Time will permit little more than an enumeration of the activities in which W P A has rendered direct assistance to the Commission's program throughout the State.

Capable blind people have been used to supplement the work of home teachers in visiting clients to whom such service could not normally be extended beyond the initial instructional period.

Instruction in music has been made available to public school sight-saving and braille classes in and about the Newark area. As a part of this work several people on this project have been assigned to the transcription of music into large type for

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the use of persons with seriously defective vision.

The very complete files of the New Jersey Commission have been gone over and the material consolidated with definite advantage to the staff and economy of space.

More than 600 factories in New Jersey have been surveyed to determine what processes might be available for performance for blind people. This is only six per cent of the factories in New Jersey, and upwards of 1,000 jobs were found which could have been performed by blind people or people with some vision.

Library facilities utilized by our home teaching and educational services have been thoroughly organized, and our Talking Book machine service has been largely cared for through our W P A project.

In closing, may I stress the fact that it is the aim of the New Jersey Commission for the Blind to provide some service to every blind person in the State whatever his age may be or whatever his station in life. It is our further objective to protect for the benefit of blind people whatever jobs or services blind people can perform to the end that the public may not lose confidence in the capabilities of blind people through the incompetency or negligence of the few, and that such opportunities as are available may be preserved for blind people still unborn. Sometimes we wish that we had the assistance of private agencies. At the same time, we in New Jersey feel ourselves fortunate in finding it possible to coordinate all public services in behalf of the blind through the auspices of a single unified organization.

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